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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 002704

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SUBJECT: ECUADOR TRYING TO STABILIZE GALAPAGOS PARK
MANAGEMENT

REF: QUITO 2599

1. Summary. The Minister of the Environment, Fabian Valdivieso, is attempting to change the process for selecting directors of the Galapagos National Park (GNP), hoping that an independent procedure will purge politics from this position and stabilize park management. The Minister proposes hiring independent consultants to devise a methodology for selecting potential candidates. The Embassy is backing this approach, encouraging an independent and transparent selection process. The Carter Center has invited Valdivieso to visit its facility to begin laying the groundwork for an international forum on the Galapagos that the center is planning for next year. The situation in the GNP remains calm. End Summary.

Proposed Format for Selecting Park Directors

2. Valdivieso has convened three meetings since announcing his initiative to depoliticize the directorship of the GNP (Reftel). He proposes hiring independent consultants to 1) develop a manual for selecting, contracting, and evaluating directors of the GNP, 2) draft a Presidential decree incorporating the procedures manual into the selection process, and 3) develop a short list of candidates to replace the interim director. The consultants will also produce a public relations strategy ensuring that there is sufficient transparency in and support of the selection process.

3. The proposed consulting team will be comprised of three people - a human resources specialist with at least five years of international experience, an administrative law specialist with knowledge of the norms and processes in the Galapagos, and a communications specialist also familiar with the problems of the Galapagos. Donors are suggesting that Valdivieso use international consultants to maintain independence in the process.

Embassy Promotes Stability from All Sides

4. The Embassy has always pushed conservation as the overriding goal in the Galapagos. We are promoting the use of international consultants in this selection process and independent selection of the director to stabilize the GNP.

5. The DCM met with Valdivieso to reiterate this point. Valdivieso commented that while the selection process is critical for stabilizing leadership in the GNP, the underlying problem also needs to be addressed - that is, the fundamental conflict between fishing and conservation. Industrial fishing cannot be sustained on the Galapagos and those living off its ever-diminishing resources need to be trained in other livelihoods. The DCM agreed but pointed out that the world is watching and there is mounting pressure to quickly stabilize the current situation. Valdivieso asked that we lobby President Gutierrez on his behalf in order to stabilize his position.

6. The Carter Center sent a letter to President Guterrez proposing an international forum to discuss the Galapagos. The DCM urged Valdivieso to visit the Carter Center as soon as possible to begin laying the groundwork for this forum. The Carter Center is a neutral party that could bring together donors and other interested parties to devise a lasting solution for the Galapagos. The DCM also encouraged Valdivieso to develop a public relations strategy to take advantage of this trip, as well as other successes that arise from this process. (Valdivieso tentatively plans to visit Atlanta the week of October 25.)

7. The Embassy is also encouraging other countries to engage the Ministry of the Environment on this topic. German Embassy officials say they will soon begin bilateral negotiations with Ecuador and that management of the Galapagos will be an issue of discussion. The Canadians and the British report that they are also pushing for stability and conservation.

All Quiet on the Western Front

18. The truce between the fishermen and the GNP employees seems to be holding, due in large part to the presence of approximately 50 armed police at the GNP. The Embassy is following the situation closely and will warn American Citizens that live in or around the GNP to leave the area should violence erupt.

Comment

19. Valdivieso, while sincere and well qualified, is politically weak. With President Gutierrez publicly and privately signaling a post-electoral cabinet adjustment, we fear Valdivieso may not be around long enough to oversee this process. For this reason, we are advising him to visit the Carter Center in the hope that his visit may bolster his public standing and boost the selection process, and lay the groundwork for a definitive solution to the Galapagos problem.

KENNEY